

"Math of Forgiveness"

Matthew 18:21-35

How many of you here today would say you are math superfans? You know, president of the Math club super fan! Dress up as the Math superhero for Halloween follow math on Twitter kind of person.

So, as you tap into your math super nerd, I'm going to throw out a math problem. 7×70 . Not super hard, but a little challenge. What did you come up with? 490.

I am going to throw out another number: 3. Three is really common in the scriptures; like the trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Jesus was in the grave 3 days and rose again on the third day. There are 3 levels of heaven.

There is also a literary writing style that is found in Hebrew writing where the highest emphasis is given to a word. In English we would use bold or underline or all caps to add emphasis to a word. In Hebrew, the word is written twice to add emphasis, or 3 times to give the absolute highest attention.

For example, when Isaiah talks about the angels around the throne of God in Isaiah 6 saying: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God almighty!" The angels did not

actually say Holy 3 times. They said it really loud and booming once!

So the idea of 3 is very powerful in scripture. So why is that important to us today as we undertake the topic of forgiveness? The reasons may surprise you! As we wade into our passage today, we see in Matthew 18:21 that Jesus has been teaching the disciples about walking carefully in our life so as not to cause offense to people. He talks also about what lengths God will go to bring one sheep back home who has strayed from the other 99. Then He talks about how to deal with someone who has hurt you or sinned against you.

After all of this, Peter felt like he was on to something. He was picking up what Jesus was putting down. Tapping into his vast understanding of the Rabbi's teaching of his day which taught that we should forgive people 3 times and no more, he says to Jesus and all who were present: "Lord, I think I got this. How often should I forgive my brother who sins against me? Maybe...7 times?"

Peter was taking the common Rabbi's teaching of forgiving 3 times taken from the Old Testament book of Amos and basically doubling it and then adding 1 more for good measure.

He thought he was on to something. If the grouchy old Rabbis say 3 times, I am going to go way beyond in my

grace and forgiveness. The problem was that Peter was not grasping at all what Jesus was trying to teach him. Jesus was not after a number the way the Rabbis were. He says to Peter, I say to you not 7, but 7 times 70. For those Math nerds here...that's where the 490 comes in. Some might be tempted to say that Jesus was being 70 times more forgiving than Peter or 150 times more forgiving than the Rabbis...but that completely misses the point.

Jesus goes on to tell a parable of two masters. Let's take a look at it in vs. 23:

MATTHEW 18:23-35

So we see in Jesus parable the story of two masters. One was a low level supervisor and the other a King.

The low level servant owed the King a ridiculously high amount of money...so much that he could never pay it off in his lifetime. The amount was 10,000 talents. That may not mean much to you but let me see if I can put it into perspective. A denarii, found later in the story was equal to approximately 1 days wages. So 100 denarii would be 100 days wages. Still a good amount of money, but certainly a debt that was manageable with some effort.

One talent in today's value and gold standard let's see what we have. Most experts say that a talent in biblical days was around 33kg or 72lbs. Gold prices per gram as

of yesterday were \$56.14. There are 1000 grams in a kilogram @ 56.14/gram = \$56,140. There are 33kg in a talent which takes our gold from \$56,140 to \$1,852,620. It was said that if you had 1 talent of gold in biblical times you were very well off and indeed, even today it is a very comfortable retirement. But wait, the king said that the servant owed him \$10,000 talents.

So we take our \$1,852,620 times 10,000 and the number is larger than any of can ever hope to make in life...

18.5 billion dollars. The cheapest Lamborghini available today is \$211,321. \$18.5 billion would buy you 87,668 new Lamborghinis. That means you could drive a brand new Lamborghini every day for 240 years before you would have to drive one a second time.

So, as we look at this parable, we see that when we try considering God's forgiveness like a math problem we get lost in the sauce real fast.

Jewish law or the Law of Moses was heavy and rigid. It **was perfect in its form, but impossible to perform.** It basically set an impossible standard to live up to with a temporary solution when man failed. That solution was the sacrifice of an innocent animal in your place. No matter how many times you brought a sacrifice to atone for your sin...there would always be another sin to atone for. It was completely unsustainable.

Jesus came to pay that price once and for all. He died on the cross to be that perfect sacrificial Lamb, atoning for our sins for all of eternity. The cost was very high!

In our parable Jesus is foreshadowing His own death on the cross by using the example of the King and the unforgiving servant. The idea he was conveying to Peter is this. The Law of Moses said 3 and done but even then you needed to offer a sacrifice for forgiveness. You thought you were being super merciful and benevolent by suggesting 7 times to forgive a brother. Jesus then throws out the 7 times 70 figure to show them that keeping track of how many times we forgive is a human and fleshly thing.

God forgives completely casting our sin as far away as the East is from the West and remembers it no more. This is illustrated by the magnitude of forgiveness of debt the King forgave his servant: \$18.5 billion vs. around \$15,000. The lesson is this: God forgave us a debt too large for us to even comprehend...we ought to forgive debts to others that are in comparison, much much smaller.

But, Chaps, You don't understand what has been done to me. How can I ever forgive that person for the horrible things they did to me or my family.

I would say, I get it. Let me tell you a little story about something that my wife and I went through.

CAMERON TESTIMONY

So, my question now to you is this: Are there limits or conditions on our forgiveness of others? By every measure of justice we should hold hate and bitterness toward both of these girls. However, we learned a long time ago...neither one of them probably care. They would in fact, be living rent free in our heads. Taking up space and holding power over us years later.

For our own sanity and peace, we let them both go long ago. Extended forgiveness toward them as a choice that in turn set us free to live again without the weight of hatred and the endless pursuit of hunting them down and making sure they face justice.

1. Forgiveness is Divine

The first thing we need to understand about forgiveness is that it is a divine thing. In other words, it was first modeled by God in the Garden when he fashioned animal skins to cover their nakedness in Genesis 3:21. It was man who sinned, but it was God who provided the covering or atonement through shed blood.

"And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them." Genesis 3:21

We continue to see with the Law of Moses that blood was required to atone for sin with sacrifices. And then of course, the ultimate atonement in blood on the cross when Jesus died for us. Forgiveness is part of the divine

plan of salvation that God had from the beginning. It is the way that his love was expressed. Because God so loved...He Gave...His one and only son to pay the cost of our sin. **Love was why, shedding of blood was how, and forgiveness was the result.**

So, in any discussion about forgiveness, we must start with God. He is the initiator of forgiveness and therefore our ultimate example.

2.Forgiveness is Hard

The next thing we must address is that forgiveness is not easy at all. It's messy. It is emotionally charged and requires us to release control of a situation to God. It requires that we do something that is impossible in our own strength. And, although it is extremely difficult, not forgiving has extraordinarily bad consequences.

Someone once said *"bitterness or resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die."*

Another variation says that *holding a grudge is like holding a hot coal in your hand waiting to throw it at another; you are the one who gets burned.*

Often in my ministry I come across people who say that *"the person who has wronged them is not worthy of their forgiveness or doesn't deserve it."* If they forgive them they are essentially saying what they did was ok and I would

be letting them off the hook. The reality is that when we offer forgiveness we are letting ourselves off the hook.

When we hold on to forgiveness, bitterness, resentment, or anger we wall ourselves up in a prison of our own making. We do so to protect ourselves from more pain but in doing so we heap more pain and misery upon ourselves. The real result is that we isolate ourselves from people and from God. Often, we don't realize we are the one who has the key to unlock our own prison cell.

Even though it is hard to forgive, especially those who have done wicked and evil things to us or the people we love, the result is freedom. Forgiveness is divine love in action that can only happen with God's help.

Someone once said: *"Today I choose to forgive you, not because you apologized or because you acknowledged the pain you caused me, but because my soul deserves peace."*

3. Forgiveness is Required

The last point I want to make is that God requires us as His followers to emulate Him. That is in fact what being a follower means: following the Leader. In this case, Christ. He was the ultimate example and gave us a pattern to live by.

There is the story conveyed by a woman named Corrie Ten Boom. She was a Dutch Christian who was arrested by the Nazis for hiding Jews during the war and thrown

into a concentration camp. Her sister and father ultimately died in the camp and Corrie nearly perished.

“It was some time ago that I was in Berlin. There came a man to me and said, ‘Ah, Miss ten Boom, I am glad to see you. Don’t you know me?’ Suddenly I saw that man. He was one of the most cruel overseers—guards—in the concentration camp. And that man said, ‘I am now Christian, I found the Lord Jesus. I read my Bible, and I know that there is forgiveness for all the sins of the whole world. Also for my sins. I have forgiveness for the cruelties I have done ... I have asked God’s grace for an opportunity that I could ask one of my very victim’s forgiveness. Fraulein ten Boom—once and you’re forgiven. Will you forgive me?’

“I could not. I remembered the suffering of my dying sister through him. But when I saw that I could not forgive, I knew that I myself had no forgiveness! Do you know what Jesus said about that? ‘When you do not forgive those who have sinned against you, My Heavenly Father will not forgive you your sins.’

“I knew. Oh, I am not ready for Jesus to come real quick because I have no forgiveness for my sins. I was not able. I could not. I could only hate him.

“Then, I took one of these beautiful texts, one of those boundless resources, Romans 5:5: ‘The love of God is shed abroad into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us.’ I said, ‘Thank you, Jesus, that you have brought into my heart God’s love through the Holy Spirit who was given to me. And thank you, Father, that your love is stronger than my hatred!’

“That same moment, I was free and I could say, ‘Brother, give me your hand,’ and I shook hands with him. And it was as if I felt God’s love stream through my arms! You’ve never touched the ocean of God’s love as when

you forgive your enemies! Can you forgive? No? I can't either. But He can!"

In closing, Forgiveness is a concept that graces nearly every page of scripture. Jesus is the very embodiment of forgiveness. Remember:

1. Forgiveness is Divine
2. Forgiveness is Hard
3. Forgiveness is Required

When we decide to forgive those who have wronged us we participate in God's redemptive plan in the world and model what He Himself has done. We open the flood gates of heaven and allow God's love to pour through us like a fountain. In your own strength you will never be able to accomplish it...but through the power of the Holy Spirit, all things are possible.